

Appendix A to the Minutes

Written responses to the Questions submitted by Members for the Council meeting on Wednesday 2 October 2024

11.1	Question from Councillor Amin Rahman	<p>Following on from the Mayor's announcement in Cabinet regarding the Council's placement policy that no resident will be sent more than 90minutes outside of the borough, could the lead member provide an update on what other work is ongoing to retain as many homeless residents in and around Tower Hamlets as possible?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The council has a legal duty to provide accommodation within the borough in the first instance, this has not changed. Given the lack of supply within the borough, if no suitable accommodation is available, the service then looks for accommodation outside of the borough, starting close to the borough and working outwards, to meet its statutory homelessness obligations.</p> <p>We focus on east London boroughs first and then other boroughs in greater London. Only as a last resort are households placed further away from the borough. All placements are based on household needs and there are no arbitrary targets or criteria to inform priorities around placement.</p> <p>The service is actively working with landlords to increase the supply of TA and PRS accommodation in and/or as close to the borough as possible.</p> <p>One example is the CHAPS scheme under which the council has committed to purchasing 200 properties for social rent. These additional permanent, low-cost homes will be complemented by the</p>
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redesignation as TA of one existing council property for each two properties acquired under the scheme. This will result in an additional 100 in-borough, council owned, low-cost TA properties by March 2026.

The council has also been granted funding under the LAHF programme to purchase an additional 32 TA properties within the borough, all of which will be of low-cost to the council and residents. These will be mix of family sized homes and will include accessible homes within these purchases.

Other work that we are doing to procure more accommodation locally includes hosting and attending landlord events and by online advertising and communications. Our next landlord event is scheduled for November this year (date to be confirmed) and is designed to increase the supply of TA and PRS accommodation.

The rates payable to landlords for TA and the incentives for PRS accommodation are also being reviewed to align ourselves with the current market trends.

We will also shortly be writing to all households in TA to introduce our 'Find Your Own' scheme, which empowers residents to find settled accommodation themselves in an area of their own choosing with the support from the council. This scheme has already been helping families secure their own PRS solutions but is now further supported by a grant for families to help with moving in costs.

These and other activities have already increased the procurement of both TA and PRS, which has helped to recently end the routine use of commercial hotels for families. We are also confident there will be no families in shared facility B&B for more than 6 weeks by Christmas.

<p>11.2</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Abdi Mohamed</p>	<p>Now that the mayor has announced he is suspending homelessness allocation policy, can he tell us how he plans to work with officers to put together a revised plan? Will he seek the opinions of staff from the homelessness team who have worked incredibly hard and under intense pressure over the last couple of years?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The housing allocations policy remains in place and is not suspended.</p> <p>The housing allocation policy will be reviewed this financial year to ensure it meets with the council's objectives as expressed by members and in the homelessness strategy.</p> <p>The review process will include engagement with all stakeholders and an analysis of our existing data and processes.</p> <p>Any change to the allocations policy will be subject to a consultation process and members approval before being implemented.</p>
<p>11.3</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Abdul Mannan</p>	<p>We are proud on this side of the chamber to have invested in policies to protect and enhance the opportunities on offer to our children. Given the decision to retain the two-child benefit cap, what measures can the Council take to ensure that we continue to support children across our borough?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Thank you for your question Cllr Mannan, it is encouraging to hear about the Chamber's continued support and investment to enhance opportunities on offer for children in our borough.</p>

At Tower Hamlets we acknowledge that the two-child benefit cap presents challenges for many families, and we recognise that every child deserves greater access to food, housing, education, children's services, and youth services.

With thanks to partnerships across our borough, we work collectively to support families disproportionately affected by the two-child benefit cap. We know that many young people are worried about the cost of living and want more support with housing pressures, education, and their health and wellbeing. We continue to strive hard to support families and children by taking measures to invest in policies and initiatives across the borough. Our partnership strategy "Accelerate!" outlines our commitment to children and their families, and our ambitions to make Tower Hamlets the best place to live.

In our 2024-2025 budget Tower Hamlets budgeted to spend nearly £55.8 million on policies that provide greater support for our children and families.

We are budgeted to spend £1.6 million on young people supported housing, this means that more young people can access emergency, essential support with housing needs. We reintroduced the Educational Maintenance Award and are budgeted to spend approximately £1.8million in Education Maintenance Award grants and £600,000 in University Bursaries. We continue to work closely with Department for Education (DfE) to increase Family Hubs, and a further £1.7m grant money is budgeted to be spent on Family Hubs across our borough.

Our Universal Free School Meal (UFSM) programme has been running successfully for many years and has been replicated London-wide by the Mayor of London. Nearly 38,000 pupils in Tower Hamlets' primary and secondary schools now have access to a free school meal, and we are budgeted to spend approximately £1.9 million on

		<p>free school meals. Our programme for secondary pupils remains the only one of its kind, and we are currently the only council in the UK providing UFSM to all KS3 and KS4 pupils, saving families on average £550 per year, per child.</p> <p>Finally, alongside increasing access to music, art, and youth services, we are budgeted to spend approximately £36.9 million on the Children Services Capital programme.</p> <p>Whilst we are proud of our work with families and young people, we acknowledge the continued challenges and recognise that we must go further to support families impacted by the two-child benefit cap. We remain committed to supporting families so that every child within the borough has the opportunity to succeed, and we will continue to take the steps necessary to be a family centred, child focussed borough that delivers real change.</p>
11.4	<p>Question from Councillor Abdal Ullah</p>	<p>Can the Mayor inform me whether he and his administration are concerned about the safety of children and this council’s safeguarding responsibilities in regard to the proposed decision to house a drug rehabilitation/counselling centre above an early years nursery in Wapping? Can he confirm whether and how these issues were properly assessed before this site was chosen?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The use of drugs and alcohol can have serious consequences for individuals, their family members, and whole communities, leading to family breakdown, homelessness, and physical and mental health problems. Tower Hamlets has one of the highest prevalence rates of substance misuse in London with an ambitious target to improve the rate at which people access and successfully complete a programme</p>

		<p>of treatment and recovery. The establishment of this service is vital to achieve this aim. It will provide a lifeline to some of the borough's hidden and most marginalised residents as well as providing a valuable education and family support resource that will help us challenge the stigma, lack of awareness and misconceptions associated with substance misuse.</p> <p>As with any service working directly with the public, risks will be continuously assessed to ensure the safety of those that use and work in the service as well as the broader building and community. This is a post treatment recovery service and those that use it will be stable in their recovery, nevertheless they will be carefully and thoughtfully assessed to ensure they are able and ready to make best use of the resources offered. This will include ensuring there is no risk to the service, its staff, or the broader community.</p> <p>We have also carefully considered the configuration of the building to ensure the service is fully segregated from the nursery, with separate entrances, and CCTV system in the building and outside. The type of service provided and how it will operate has also been informed by its proposed location.</p>
<p>11.5</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Jahed Choudhury</p>	<p>Could the Lead member provide an update on the council's outstanding accounts requiring sign off? These accounts were left unsigned for 6 years under the previous administration?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>All previous outstanding accounts from 2016/17 to 2019/20 (4-years) have been audited. Remaining previous years (20/21, 21/22 and 22/23) will be signed off in December 2024 by Deloitte which is fully compliant with the new government guidelines on back stop</p>

		<p>dates. For the 23/24 year, work with new auditors (EY) is on-going and is expected to be completed by February 2025, again in full compliance with the published guidance from government re backstop dates.</p>
11.6	<p>Question from Councillor Amina Ali</p>	<p>Can the Mayor inform me as to whether he (as mayor), the council (as an institution) or any other senior officers, sought the advice of counsel in relation to the recent Best Value Inspection? If so, and in each case, have council funds been used to seek this advice?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Council has sought the advice of counsel in relation to the recent Best Value Inspection specifically to advise on the interests of the Council. Council funds have been used to seek this advice. The Council has not commissioned counsel to advise any politician or staff member in respect of any personal legal matters that might arise from the report.</p>
11.7	<p>Question from Councillor Ahmodul Kabir</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member provide an update on the Best Value Inspection that concluded in July?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Best Value Inspection of the Council announced in February 2024 concluded on 31st July 2024. The report has been passed to the SoS HCLG for consideration. The SoS will address the House of Commons at the time of her choosing to comment upon the findings and set out any action that may flow from them. The Council awaits that statement.</p>

<p>11.8</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury</p>	<p>The law-and-order situation in Mile End ward is major concern. The Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) has reported that they are lacking adequate resources, particularly in terms of manpower, and are requesting additional hours. Could the cabinet member clarify what steps will be taken to support the SNT in improving law and order in the Mile End ward?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Metropolitan Police take primacy for the maintenance of law and order. We have shared the concerns raised with the Chief Inspector of Safer Neighbourhood Policing in Tower Hamlets. We understand Mile End Ward has a full complement of police officers i.e. 1 x ward Sgt, 4 x permanent Dedicated Ward Officers, 1 x Safer Schools officer and 2 x Police Community Support Officers. The overall aim is to increase this to 5 PCSOs in 2025. The Inspector responsible for Mile End is Inspector Louise Steeden. Inspector Steeden can provide more details on tackling crime and activity in the ward. The council supports the work of the police neighbourhood teams with additional Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers and dedicated anti-social behaviour officers who also work on a locality basis with the local police teams. Success of this partnership working and impact can be seen in Mile End ward following the recent operation to deal with crime and drug issues in and around the Salmon Lane area.</p>
<p>11.9</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Bodrul Choudhury</p>	<p>Given the Government’s decision to remove the Winter Fuel Allowance from nearly 10 million pensioners (including many vulnerable people), and knowing that 40% of households in Tower Hamlets suffered from fuel poverty last winter, what steps is the Council taking to mitigate against this cut, which will most likely plunge even more of our residents below this poverty line?</p>

Response

The Government's decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only those on Pension Credit or certain other benefits has serious implications for many pensioners who previously relied on this support to cover their winter heating costs. We recognise the impact this cut will have on our community, particularly with many already struggling with the rising cost of living. In response, the Council is fully committed to ensuring our most vulnerable residents receive the support they need during the winter months. We have already implemented a range of measures to support pensioners and will continue to take further action to mitigate the impact of this change.

In the most recent tranche of the Household Support Fund, we allocated £535,325 specifically to support pensioners. Over the past week, we distributed £95 cash vouchers to 5,635 low-income pensioner households across the borough, providing targeted financial assistance and ensuring those missing out on the Winter Fuel Payment are still being supported. This continues our ongoing commitment to pensioners, following previous tranches of the Household Support Fund where we have awarded a total of £1,730,130 in cash vouchers exclusively to pensioners since October 2022.

Looking ahead, the Government has also confirmed a further tranche of the Household Support Fund running until March 2025. While we are still awaiting further details, once our allocation is confirmed, we will continue to provide ringfenced support to our pensioners and other vulnerable residents.

Given the changes to the Winter Fuel Payment eligibility, it's more important than ever for eligible pensioners to apply for Pension Credit as it is now a key gateway to accessing the Winter Fuel Allowance. In

Tower Hamlets, we have been proactively focusing our efforts on increasing Pension Credit uptake to ensure that no eligible resident misses out. Thanks to our targeted campaigns last year, 290 more pensioners in the borough are now claiming Pension Credit, and the households now claiming are on average almost £4,000 better off per year. This is the result of proactive outreach efforts, including personalised mail-outs, advice sessions, and benefit checks.

In the coming weeks, we will initiate another targeted Pension Credit campaign to reach eligible residents and support them in making a claim. As part of Challenge Poverty Week, running from 14th to 20th October, we will launch an intensified push to raise awareness and drive further uptake of Pension Credit and other income maximisation opportunities, especially ahead of the Winter Fuel Allowance deadline of 21st December.

Alongside this, we are using our innovative Lower Income Family Tracker dashboard to identify and target the most vulnerable pensioners in the borough, ensuring they are made aware of and connected to the local commissioned support available. This includes assistance with pensions, housing, care, debt, welfare, and benefits.

We will also be relaunching our Warm Hubs this winter. These heated and welcoming spaces will be open across the borough, providing residents with a safe place to go, along with hot drinks and refreshments. Staff at these hubs will offer advice and signposting to additional support services, ensuring residents have access to the help they need.

Additionally, we aim to consolidate all available support into one easy-to-access resource in the form of our Cost of Living Help booklet which we hope to publish later this year, in a format accessible to those unable to access online support. This will sit alongside the

		<p>information we already provide on our Cost of Living webpage, ensuring our residents are fully informed of the help that is available to them.</p> <p>Finally, our Resident Support Scheme is available year-round for residents to apply for in times of financial crisis. The scheme provides food and fuel vouchers, as well as support with white goods and furniture based on an individual's circumstances. Open to all residents, regardless of benefit status, this will be a crucial resource for those impacted by the cut to the Winter Fuel Payment. We also have a dedicated outreach team who offer holistic, face-to-face support at various locations across the borough. The team speaks multiple community languages and can assist residents in applying for benefits, grants, and discounts, while also making referrals to other essential services.</p> <p>Both the Resident Support Scheme and our outreach team are key parts of our efforts to ensure that vulnerable residents receive the support they need during these challenging times.</p>
11.10	<p>Question from Councillor Mufeedah Bustin</p>	<p>Will the Mayor share details of how CIL and Neighbourhood CiL has been used in the last two years and how it is being planned to be used on the Isle of Dogs this year?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The response to the question requires several data tables which can be provided as a written follow up. Narrative detail is provided below that points towards the relevant data on web pages and in embedded tables.</p> <p>Details on how the council has used (i.e. spent) CIL and NCIL in the 22/23 financial year is set out in the Infrastructure Funding Statement</p>

which is published annually and is available on the council's website (link below).

[Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](https://towerhamlets.gov.uk/infrastructure-funding-statement-2022-23)

The council's next Infrastructure Funding Statement for the 23/24 financial year is due to be published by the end of December this year. The provisional figures for CIL/NCIL (including LIF) are set out below.

Project	CIL Spend 23/24 (£)
Wood Wharf Expansion	1,790,000.00
Youth Provision phase 1	285,704.78
Secondary Schools UFSM	303,528.56
Transformation of CCTV system	813,209.62
Protective Security Fund - Community Safety	7,000.00
Victoria Park Toilet Improvements project	380,117.15
Victoria Park - electric charging for ice cream vans	3,457.64
Flats Recycling package	379,548.61
Electric Waste Vehicles	151,378.28
Tree Planting in the Borough	591,394.07
Additional Rubbish and Recycling bins	104,240.64
Whitechapel Road Improvements	764,532.70
Liveable Streets	4,739.42
150 lamp column EV charging points	16,612.00
Plumbers Row	20,588.49
Roman Road West Regeneration Programme	146,281.89
Public Realm Improvement New Town Hall	898,594.65
Sewardstone Rd ASC	365,537.88
Norman Grove (Adult Social Care element)	1,022,381.53
Goodmans Fields - Improvements to Health Infrastructure	579,552.86
Sutton Wharf - Improvements to Health Infrastructure	182,091.44
New Health Centre on Wood Wharf development site	2,617,544.56

Project	LIF/NCIL Spend 23/24 (£)
Inclusive Playgrounds	119,609.62
Quality Parks	600,000.00
Electric Charging Points for Council Vehicles	195,887.38
Enforcing Effective Recycling & Waste Management using Enhanced CCTV	1,320.00
Recycling and Food Waste Solutions	9,252.50
Thames Path	21,360.79
Community Gardens Programme	25,509.74
Development Co-ordination Pilot Programme	56,897.55
Infrastructure Delivery Coordination Pilots Programme	21,726.79
Regeneration Team Enabling Development Programme	550,570.70
Small Works	17,259.42
Public Safety	460,000.00
Southern Bridges	46,666.00
Grants Programme	982,078.70

The council's current capital programme was adopted in January 2024 (see link below).

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 31/01/2024 17:30](#)

towerhamlets.gov.uk

Details of how CIL and NCIL (including remaining LIF projects) will be applied this year is set out in the table below. In addition to the projects set out in the spreadsheet, you should note that under the new approach to NCIL, £3.418m was ringfenced for the Mayor’s Community Grant Programme, Small Grants Programme and Emergency Grants. Funding will continue to be allocated/drawn down through the council’s grant process.

General Fund Capital Programme 2023 to 2027

Directorate	Theme	Programme	Project	Additions/Removals				Proposed Budget Profiling 23-27						All years Financing (4 years)											
				23-26 Budget Em	IMD/RCD A/ O/A Additions in year	Removals s via Internal Gov	Provisionality agreed/s subject to CSB	Rements	Proposed Budget 23-27 Em	Revised Forecast 23/24 Em	Budget 24-25 Em	Budget 25-26 Em	Budget 26-27 Em	Budget Total (4yr) Em	Grants Em	S100 Em	CL Em	LIF Em	Capital Receipts Em	RTB Receipts Em	Borrowing Em	Prudential 9 Em	Rev. Em	Total Funding (4 yr) 23-27 Em	
Children's Approved	Basic Need	Mulberry	38.03			11.13	0.65	50.41	37.52	12.14	0.74		50.41	51.43		-0.99									50.41
Children's Approved	Basic Need	Wood Wh	3.26	0.80				4.07	3.47	0.60			4.07	0.85	1.43	1.79									4.07
Children's Approved	Basic Need	Institute o	3.00			15.00		15.00	0.50	8.50	5.00	1.00	15.00		9.11	5.89									15.00
Children's Approved	Children's Improvem		3.00					3.00		1.00	1.00	1.00	3.00		1.95	1.05									3.00
Children's Approved	School Im	Secondary	-	0.72		0.07		0.79	0.72	0.07			0.79												0.79
Community Approved	Community Transform		0.44					0.44	0.44				0.44												0.44
Community Approved	Culture	Leisure Cl	39.15					39.15	0.95	19.10	16.15	2.95	39.15		4.13	13.90						21.12			39.15
Community Approved	Markets	EV Trader	0.33					0.33	0.33				0.33												0.33
Community Approved	New Infra	Whitech	9.35					9.28	1.23	6.42	1.63		9.28	8.49	0.02	0.76									9.28
Community Approved	Parks	Barriett Pt	0.26					0.26	0.17	0.10			0.26												0.26
Community Approved	Parks	Victoria P	0.32					0.32	0.32				0.32												0.32
Community Approved	Parks	Victoria P	0.10					0.10	0.10				0.10												0.10
Community Approved	Public Res	Bigland St	-		0.16	0.24		0.46		0.32	0.08		0.40		0.16	0.24									0.46
Community Approved	Waste, Re	Flats Recy	18.05					18.05	1.93	12.74	3.39		18.05	6.19	0.66	11.20									18.05
Community Approved	Waste, Re	Electric W	1.82					1.82	0.70	0.55	0.46	0.09	1.82												1.82
Community Approved	Waste, Re	Tree Plant	4.50					3.04	0.60	0.90	1.50	0.04	3.04												3.04
Community Approved	Waste, Re	URS West	0.54					0.54	0.40	0.14			0.54												0.54
Community Approved	Waste, Re	Additional	-			1.49		1.49					1.49												1.49
Health, Ac Approved	Adult Soci	Norman C	0.62		0.07			1.19	0.72	0.46			1.19												1.19
Health, Ac Approved	Adult Soci	On Tech	-		0.30			0.30		0.30			0.30		0.04	0.26									0.30
Health, Ac Approved	Public He	Goodmart	0.96					0.96	0.02	0.96			0.96												0.96
Health, Ac Approved	Public He	Surton Wt	0.26					0.26	0.26	0.00			0.26		0.08	0.18									0.26
Health, Ac Approved	Public He	New Heat	3.21					3.21	2.32	0.89			3.21		0.60	2.61									3.21
Health, Ac Approved	Public He	Substanc	-			1.51		1.51		1.51			1.51												1.51
Housing & Approved	Asset Man	Montbellor	1.21					1.21	0.25	0.96			1.21			0.22			0.99						1.21
Housing & Approved	High Stree	Midlesex	0.49	0.85				1.34	0.49	0.85			1.34		0.06	0.38									1.34
Housing & Approved	High Stree	Roman R	0.51					0.48	0.48				0.48												0.48
Housing & Approved	London St	Public Res	0.90					0.90	0.67	0.03			0.90												0.90
Resource Approved	Community	Banglat	-			1.00		1.00		1.00			1.00		0.30	0.70									1.00
Community Approved	Community Protectiv		0.28					0.01	0.01				0.01												0.01
			127.82	2.38	0.22	30.73	-0.31	1.08	161.93	54.79	72.09	29.96	5.09	161.93	66.93	17.74	54.09	1.05	0.99		21.12				161.93

General Fund Capital Programme 2023 to 2027

Directorate	Theme	Programme	Project	Additions/Removals				Proposed Budget Profiling 23-27						All years Financing (4 years)											
				23-26 Budget Em	IMD/RCD A/ O/A Additions in year	Removals s via Internal Gov	Provisionality agreed/s subject to CSB	Rements	Proposed Budget 23-27 Em	Revised Forecast 23/24 Em	Budget 24-25 Em	Budget 25-26 Em	Budget 26-27 Em	Budget Total (4yr) Em	Grants Em	S100 Em	CL Em	LIF Em	Capital Receipts Em	RTB Receipts Em	Borrowing Em	Prudential 9 Em	Rev. Em	Total Funding (4 yr) 23-27 Em	
Children's Approved	Children's Improvem	Inclusive	3.00					3.00		1.00	1.00	1.00	3.00			1.95	1.05								3.00
Community Approved	Parks	Quality Pt	4.48			0.07		-0.16	-0.05	0.51	0.43	0.09		0.51	0.20	0.08									0.51
Community Approved	Waste, Re	Responsi	0.02					-0.77	-0.58	3.22	0.22		3.22		2.12	1.19	-0.09								3.22
Community Approved	Waste, Re	Electric Cl	0.02					0.02	0.02				0.02												0.02
Community Approved	Waste, Re	Public Sub	0.02					0.02	0.02				0.02												0.02
Community LIF Progra	Communi	Public Sub	0.80					0.80	0.80				0.80												0.80
Community LIF Progra	Local	Envi Communi	0.34					0.03	0.03				0.03												0.03
Community LIF Progra	New Infra	Thames P	0.39					0.39	0.30	0.10			0.39												0.39
Community LIF Progra	Parks	St George	-					0.12	0.12				0.12												0.12
Community LIF Progra	Waste, Re	Wastey M	0.02					0.02	0.02				0.02												0.02
Community LIF Progra	Waste, Re	Enforcing	0.13					0.13	0.13				0.13												0.13
Community LIF Progra	Waste, Re	Recycling	0.25					0.25	0.24	0.01			0.25												0.25
Community LIF Progra	Waste, Re	Smart Bin	-					0.31	0.31				0.31												0.31
Community LIF Progra	Environm	LIF Using	0.30					0.02	0.02				0.02												0.02
			10.98		0.07			-1.52	0.61	9.74	3.36	4.38	1.00	1.00	9.74	0.20	2.20	1.95	5.48	-0.09					9.74

11.11 Question from Councillor Iqbal Hussain

It has been a year since the LGA Corporate Peer Review which looked at various functions of the council, and areas for improvement. The LGA Peer Review team are about to return to check on progress against their recommendations. Can the Lead Member feedback on where we are in relation to this, and is there anything we should be worried about?

		<p>Response</p> <p>Position Update on CPC Delivery</p> <p>Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (LGA CPC) review of Tower Hamlets Council took place in September 2023. The review resulted in 18 key recommendations spanning core areas for the Council.</p> <p>The Council aims to address all recommendations and subsequent actions before the end of the 2024-25 financial year. However, this is not a tick box exercise and completion dates may be extended if this is necessary to achieve a better outcome. The Council set out a wide range of specific actions in its LGA CPC Action Plan which it has published on its web site. These actions were based upon recommendations or suggested improvements set out in the main body of the review report by the CPC team themselves. Members of all parties have been free to suggest additional actions for inclusion from the outset. To date no additional suggestions have been forthcoming. As of 24th September 2024, the Council has completed 84% of the actions set out in the Plan. The Council has fully completed all of the actions specific to 10 (56%) of the core recommendations. The majority of actions relating to the remaining core recommendations have been completed with the outstanding actions on track to be completed as planned. Progress continues to be overseen by the Transformation Advisory Board as recommended by the LGA CPC team. The Council was disappointed that the LGA CPC progress review was delayed due to the unavailability of some peer review team members. We remain committed to securing a revised date for the revisit as soon as possible.</p>
11.12	Question from	Can the Mayor and Lead Member inform me what action is being taken to stop cars and mopeds using the new bridge at Monier road

	<p>Councillor Marc Francis</p>	<p>that is supposed to be for buses, cyclists and pedestrians only?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Monier Road Bridge is currently available for use by local buses, cyclists and pedestrians only. The use of Monier Road bridge by motor vehicles other than buses and emergency vehicles is prohibited by an experimental traffic order introduced in December 2023. The bus-gate restriction is enforced by ANPR camera with PCN's for its contravention being issued by LBTH's Parking Enforcement team.</p> <p>The trial restriction is in place for a maximum period of 18 months and discussions between the council and LDDC are in progress to determine the permanent introduction of the bus-gate and any implications there may be for local development consents.</p>
<p>11.13</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Suluk Ahmed</p>	<p>Can the lead member update me on the improvements being made to the housing options service?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy delivery plan has been prepared, with feedback from managers and staff, through individual team meetings and surveys. The Strategy and Delivery Plan will be considered by Cabinet in the next few weeks.</p> <p>The Delivery Plan, alongside the Housing Options Independent Review, and other key project and initiatives are being incorporated into a 12-month Service Plan.</p> <p>The Housing Options Task Force has been established, with the first meeting held on 19th September 2024. Terms of reference were</p>

		<p>agreed including the roles of the members of the task force, and progress on key activities was also shared.</p> <p>Recruitment/onboarding is underway following the approval of the additional staff. The new Training Officer is now in post and organising specialist training for staff, which is due to commence January 2025.</p> <p>The newly appointed Service Improvement Practitioner is also in post now and working with the new Head of Homelessness on practical improvements such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlining processes within the service to empower caseworkers in decision-making • Introducing the new Cost-of-Living grant to support residents who have been asked to leave their families accommodation • Ongoing improvement work on the Resident’s Hub and client journey through the recruitment of a specialist Triage Team.
<p>11.14</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Amy Lee</p>	<p>Can the lead member provide a full update on the future of St George’s Leisure Centre?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The council Capital Delivery Team have been working closely with the leisure and housing colleagues and the multi-disciplinary design team to complete the RIBA Stage 3 design including the revised costing subject to approval. The consultant team have prepared all documentation for a full planning application submission, and documentation for tender for Principal Contractor procurement. The project team are finalising the contract for hard-strip demolition of the leisure centre which is anticipated to start before the end of the year. This will mark the first phase of a multi-million pound investment to</p>

		create a new flagship swimming pool and leisure centre for the residents of Tower Hamlets following the insourcing of the <i>Be Well</i> leisure service in May.
11.15	<p>Question from Councillor Ahmodur Khan</p>	<p>Can the Lead Member explain how a Homecare provider under the previous Administration was awarded a contract initially valued at £5m which then ballooned to a staggering £62m – an increase of £57m!</p> <p>Response</p> <p>At the time of the contract award in what was then a limited supplier market, a small number of suppliers were selected, but shortly after, one went bankrupt, and their business was transferred to one of the others. The contract was extended rather than retendered at the earliest opportunity. The “call off” nature of these contracts caps expenditure by activity budget and as such strong monitoring system needs to be in place to ensure effective controls and avoid excessive dependencies on a contractor.</p> <p>The council has implemented new controls, including a contract value cap, internal trigger alerts for supplier limit breaches, and load balancing measures to ensure fair work distribution across suppliers, which were not previously in place.</p>
11.16	<p>Question from Councillor Sabina Khan</p>	<p>How many residents are currently placed in temporary accommodation?</p> <p>Response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are currently 3,126 households in TA • There are now no families in commercial hotels

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We remain confident that we will have ended the use of hotels for accommodating families with children by March next year. We remain on target to having no families in b&b for more than 6 weeks by Christmas.
11.17	<p>Question from Councillor Bellal Uddin</p>	<p>Given the recent and continuing threats from the far right, what is the council doing to maintain community cohesion and protect at risk groups in the borough?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The Council recognises the significant impact the recent disorder fuelled by far-right racism and hatred had on our community and the fear it generated. It is important to note that during that time the borough did not experience any of the protests that were seen in other parts of the country which is an indication of the cohesiveness of the community and the work that was undertaken by Community Safety to ensure the borough remains ‘No Place for Hate’.</p> <p>The Community Safety Team work closely with the police, the Tension Monitoring Group, the No Place for Hate Forum and groups working with young people to ensure any information regarding any emerging threat is shared cross our networks and actions are undertaken to mitigate those threats.</p> <p>The Council’s new cohesion strategy will aim to build on the excellent work that has taken place over recent years to ensure that such threats have minimal impact on our community.</p>
11.18	<p>Question from Councillor Asma Begum</p>	<p>Can the Lead member inform me as a percentage how many secondary school children are taking up the free school meal offer from the council and whether the council has been made aware of any concerns regarding the quality of the meals?</p>

Response

One million more free meals have been served to students in Tower Hamlet since the UFSM scheme was launched one year ago.

The take up for the first term from Sept to December 2023 was 66.4%. This was lower than expected due to the warm weather, staggered launch of the project and uptake data not accurately recorded by some schools.

From January to March 2024 the take up reached 71% reflecting the trend for more pupils wanting a hot lunch in the winter months.

In the summer term take up was lower, 63.9% but this is due to study leave/exams and generally fewer students on site.

Indications from schools and caterers is that UFSM uptake is already better this year & success is really beginning to build. The first year of UFSM was a big cultural shift for pupils moving from buying snacks mostly at morning break to now having a meal at lunchtime & this is becoming habitual. Student engagement is better & the services have adapted to higher numbers going through at lunchtime & the food offer has also adapted to meet the needs of students.

Quality of Food

Since the implementation of the scheme, there has been a notable improvement in menu quality and compliance with the School Food Standards. Compliance rates improved 15% for both morning break and lunch services, and by 13% for lunch service alone. The average level of compliance for secondary school food across the borough is 87% for all services and 88% for lunch only.

		<p>Over 500 students were engaged in feedback on UFSM across 20 secondary schools – pupils who were not taking up the meal were interviewed in the playground as well as those who were in the dining room. Students identified 7 key areas to improve meal quality and uptake:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Authenticity matters – they like traditional recipes 2. Recipe & menus need to be varied simple & popular 3. The advertised menu should be followed 4. Food items should be available for the whole length of the service 5. Portion sizes should be consistent 6. Long queue times to be addressed as these were cited as a significant deterrent for students taking up lunch, leading to some students choosing not to take lunch and to socialise instead of eating. <p>Sales at morning break are down in all schools and this is good news as it was usually the unhealthy snacks and cheap/unhealthier Grab & Go items of food that were sold at this time. The most significant takeaway from UFSM and its impact on eating habits is that students are purchasing fewer unhealthy products. The change in buying patterns is likely to contribute to improved long-term health outcomes for the students.</p>
11.19	<p>Question from Councillor Abdul Malik</p>	<p>Given the Council's recent receipt of a Youth Justice SEND Quality Lead Status with a Child First Commendation from the Association of Youth Offending Team Managers, can the Lead Member update on what other progress has been made following the failed Youth Justice inspection of July 2022?</p>

Response

The YJS Service has been working extremely hard in improving and developing the offer for some of our most vulnerable children in the borough. This has included an indepth training programme, revising policies and procedures and realigning our key priorities to include:

- Consistently Good Practice
- Child First
- Improving Education Outcomes
- Improving Health Outcomes

The service has new governance arrangements which ensures that the service, and their partners, are held to account and can respond to any issues pertaining to the service. The Governance Board is chaired by Steve Reddy. The service redesigned the Quality Assurance processes in January 2023 and this has been highlighted as best practice by the Youth Justice Board. We use these processes to ensure the quality of our work and have also had external scrutiny, most recently a Peer Review completed by the Youth Justice Service Improvement Partnership (YJSIP), to have a greater lens on the development of the service. The YJSIP stated that they 'witnessed what had been a great journey, it was clear that a huge amount of work had taken place since your HMIP Inspection' and they highlighted the strength in leadership, supported by the YJS being placed within the Supporting Families Directorate.

A key highlight of the progress made by the Service has been in the recent data returns received from the Youth Justice Board which shows that our First Time Entrants rate has reduced to 126 per 100,000 – this is under the London and National average – demonstrating that we are able to divert children away from the formal Criminal Justice System.

<p>11.20</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Shubo Hussain</p>	<p>There have recently been an increased number of road accidents in Bromley South in recent months – particularly on Violet Road. Will the lead member commit to visiting the accident hotspot with me and ensuring this council puts in place measures to reduce road deaths?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>I can confirm that the Council currently has no plans for traffic schemes on Violet Road. However, we will take note of the request, examine existing speed and accident data, and ensure that it is considered together with other priority casualty locations once an appropriate funding stream become available.</p> <p>Many of the issues described in the inquiry can only be addressed by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) who have the necessary powers to enforce speeding offences. The Transportation team will share the identified concerns with the MPS so that they can consider increased presence, enforcement, and visibility through speed-related initiatives.</p> <p>It's important to reiterate that the Council is not responsible for individual driver behaviour and does not have any enforcement powers. However, we will continue to pass on concerns to the police and urge community members to report incidents of speeding or dangerous driving directly to the MPS for their investigation by calling the non-emergency 101 number.</p>
<p>11.21</p>	<p>Question from Councillor James King</p>	<p>Could the lead member inform me as to how the council would intend to enforce its proposed dog PSPO? Will THEOs begin patrolling dog walking hot spots?</p> <p>Response</p>

		<p>We expect enforcement of proposed dog control PSPO's to be carried out by Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officer (THEOs), Environmental Service Officers and Animal Wardens within the Communities directorate. The extent of this enforcement work will be dependent on the outcome of the consultation and final agreement of dog control PSPO's to be introduced. We will be reviewing the use of enforcement officers across the Communities directorate, to support enforcement of these and other powers to tackle antisocial behaviour.</p>
<p>11.22</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Sirajul Islam</p>	<p>Months ago council officers accompanied me on a walk around my ward and noted that there was an increased number of road traffic accidents on the Old Ford Road – Can the lead member confirm whether there has been any follow up on this and whether the council is planning to put in place any safety measures that would work to decrease the number of accidents?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>The current layout on Old Ford Road represents the 3rd phase of traffic-calming features developed in close consultation with local residents. The following is a brief overview of the history:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 2001, speed cushions were installed responding to residents' request. • Around 2008, residents requested the removal of speed cushions due to concerns about noise and vibrations. In response, the cushions were replaced with centre islands to narrow the road and address these concerns. • In 2017, the road layout was altered to its current form in response to residents' concerns and several complaints. This change involved using parking bays as a chicane to alter the direction of vehicles, and it came about through a consultation process with residents who had previously objected to vertical calming features.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In late 2020, a public consultation was held for the area known as Old Ford Road West as part of a Liveable Streets scheme. However, the program was later cancelled in mid-2022. <p>This history demonstrates the council's commitment to recognising and addressing residents' concerns on Old Ford Road. However, ongoing challenges stem from site and vehicle usage constraints, the nature of this designated B-road, and the constraints set by residents.</p> <p>Ultimately, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is responsible for enforcing speeding laws. Council officers have highlighted these issues and asked MPS for appropriate action.</p>
<p>11.23</p>	<p>Question from Councillor Rebecka Sultana</p>	<p>What progress is the council making in reducing the number of children being unable to get EHCPs within the legal time frame? What support is the council giving schools to be able to care for SEND children?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>What efforts are being taken to improve EHCP timeliness</p> <p>Tower Hamlets and the City of London Area Partnership have been awarded the Youth Justice SEND Quality Lead Status with a Child First Commendation. This title has been awarded by Microlink and the AYM (Association of Youth Offending Team Managers) - a professional group that ensures better outcomes for children with SEND in the youth justice system. The council's SEND Service was also awarded the 23/24 international DFN Project Search for getting 100% interns into employment. These awards showcase the outstanding collaborative work between the council's SEND team and</p>

Youth Justice Service and the council's focus on transition to adulthood.

Whilst our support and outcomes for young people with SEN is award winning, our current EHCP timeliness is below the national average, with 44% of plans completed within the 20-week statutory period, compared to the national average of 49%. The sharp rise in the number of EHC plans from 1,850 in 2015/16 to 4,646 in September 2024 and significant staff turnover in the spring has had a negative impact on timeliness. Increased demand makes it more difficult to meet statutory deadlines as does an unplanned reduction in capacity and expertise. To address this, we stabilised the team by appointing an interim SENAR Service Manager, Team Manager, and additional caseworkers. We also provided training to enhance caseworker proficiency in quality assurance and legal processes, promoting more consistent practice. Internal procedures have been streamlined to accelerate approvals, and robust tracking systems have been implemented to monitor progress in real time.

Delays in receiving advice from other services and partners have further affected the timeliness of EHC assessments. When critical input from health, social care, or education professionals is delayed, it creates a backlog and extends the assessment timeframe. We are working to improve our communication with partners and are supporting this with a new tracker which contains an advice monitor, track and chase function.

We are also improving our communication with families – they will be better informed throughout the process through regular communication, including updates on the progress of their child's plan, expected timelines, and any potential delays. Caseworkers will maintain contact via phone, email, and meetings, ensuring families have opportunities to ask questions and provide input. This proactive

approach will build trust, keeps families fully engaged, and reassure them that their child's needs are being addressed, even if there are delays in the process.

How do we support schools regarding SEND

We have a range of specialist support staff who advise schools on working with children with SEND, including educational psychologists, hearing and visually impaired services, learning advisory teachers, outreach teachers from special schools. We have a new SEND and Inclusion Strategy, following consultation with schools and parents/carers, and this outlines the improvements we will be making to our SEND provision over coming years.

We are currently working to introduce an Inclusion Framework and SEN Front Door system. The Inclusion Framework will provide a comprehensive guide to promote best practices for inclusive education, while the SEN Front Door will offer schools and families easy access to pathways and information to support for children and young people with SEND. Also, the Mayor's investment in SEN has allowed us to expand capacity, enabling SEN caseworkers to visit schools and host coffee mornings for parents/carers alongside school staff. These visits will help strengthen our relationships and improve our communication with SENCOs. To further support schools, our SEN service provides training to SENCOs during the termly SENCO conferences and networking opportunities.

We also seek to ensure that Headteachers are aware of key priorities by presenting essential SEND updates at consultative meetings.

In response to requests from schools and colleges for a clearer post-16 offer, additional funding received from the Mayor has been allocated to develop vocational and employment pathways for young

		<p>people with SEND. This expansion is helping to meet the growing demand for tailored support in the transition to adulthood.</p>
11.24	<p>Question from Councillor Leelu Ahmed:</p>	<p>How many residents have qualified for the council's new council tax reduction scheme?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>72 households have received the additional support the scheme offers. A number of applications were received from those already receiving council tax relief and as such did not receive any increase in their council tax costs.</p> <p>We continue to advertise the scheme and have worked with Communications to reach as many residents as possible. Further work planned to include a stall in the Town Hall next week and we have extended the closing date to 31/10/24.</p>
11.25	<p>Question from Councillor Peter Golds</p>	<p>The government recently announced that they will follow the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's recommendation to offer Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans to Disabled and vulnerable residents of high-rise blocks. The Inquiry's report also recognises that associating risk with a particular height of building is arbitrary. Does the council plan to extend the offer of PEEPs to Disabled and vulnerable residents of all housing blocks in the borough?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>We have a rolling annual programme of visits to homes across all our high rise blocks and have collected the information that makes up a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) for our residents who need it. We share this information with the emergency services in</p>

		<p>each buildings' Premise Information Box, which emergency services also have access to.</p> <p>We haven't formally issued any PEEPs as the Government, following a consultation exercise in 2021, decided not to implement this recommendation due to concerns about safety and costs. We are waiting for the outcome of the government consultation on EEIS (emergency evacuation information sharing). We will review our position following any further announcements from Government.</p>
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